

# The Builder.

No. CCCCII.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19, 1850.



THE following letter has been addressed to the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor elect, Mr. Alderman Musgrave:—

My Lord,—At one of the Old Bailey dinners last year, Mr. Hill afforded me the opportunity of mentioning to you an often-repeated regret on my part, that no endeavour was made to improve the character of the annual city "show" on the 9th of November. I ventured to remark, with reference to the antiquity of the procession, and its interesting character, that some little invention and taste might, at all events, be exercised upon it, in lieu of repeating year after year the same dull and effete routine; and I suggested that, as it would probably soon be your privilege to act as chief magistrate of London, you should strive to vary the character of the procession, revive its associations, and introduce into it some work of modern skill and ingenuity. You were good enough to say that you felt the force of the observation, and consented (so far as a first hearing would justify), in my views; and you invited me, when the proper time came, to place the subject again before you.

I gladly comply with the request, and will first remind your lordship of the extent to which the mayor's "riding" or "show" was carried in early times. It appears to have been originated by the provision in the charter granted to the city by King John, in May, 1214, that every new mayor should be presented to the king for approbation. The earliest show of which we have any mention is that recorded by Matthew Paris, as taking place in 1236, when Henry III. was king. The first recorded exhibition by the trades of London in the ceremony took place in 1298. The water-procession was introduced at least as early as 1436. Besides the usual procession a scenic spectacle afterwards came to be introduced, under the title of a pageant. The earliest notice of one of these yet found relates to the show of 1510. There is a printed account of speeches delivered by the characters in the pageant of 1585, from which it may be inferred that an emblem was then exhibited, setting forth the excellencies of London, "rich and fortunate."

I need not say, as a mimic Sir William Walworth was made to say in the fishmongers' pageant on Lord Mayor's Day, 1616:—

"Now, worthy lord, there is imposed on me  
A brief narration of each several Shew  
Provided for this triumph;"—

but I will allude cursorily to one or two of them, to recall the elaborate character of the shows at that time. Thus, in the pageant for 1613, "The Triumphs of Truth" for the mayoralty of Sir Thomas Middleton, in Cheap-side appeared "London's Triumphant Mount," veiled by a mist, cast over it by Error's friends, Barbarism, Ignorance, Impudence, and Falsehood,—four monsters with clobs. At the command of Truth the mist vanished, the cloud suddenly rose, and changed into a bright spreading canopy, stuck thick with stars. In the midst sat London, with Religion, Liber-

ality, Knowledge, Fame, and Meekness. The pageant moved on: Error again threw London into a mist, and the clever mechanist again dispelled it, to typify the power of truth.\*

The pageant of 1617 set forth "The Triumphs of Homer and Industry," and might be taken for a foreshadowing of what is to happen in 1851. In the course of it, Industry declared the joy she diffuses to the world, and introduced the "pageant of several nations" to honour the mayor, wherein figured an Englishman, Frenchman, Irishman, Spaniard, Turk, Jew, Dane, Polander, Barbarian, and Russian.

Several years afterwards, too,† amongst other curious devices, a figure was set up at Foster-lane, habited in the manner and fashion of several nations which trade with Europe, and was made to say,—

"Although my shape may seem ridiculous,  
Unsuitable, rude, and incongruous,  
Content me not; there's nothing that I wear  
About me but some relation bear  
To the customs of those countreys with whom  
You traffique in all parts of Christendome."

This was the Industrial Exhibition of 1661. The majority of the pageants were fanciful rather than instructive, but still had thought and skill in them. Men of wit were engaged to devise them, and skilful mechanists and carvers to execute. Inigo Jones did not think it beneath him to apply his inventive powers in the preparation of similar devices for the Court. "Invented and fashioned, with the ground and special structure of the whole works, by our kingdomes most Artfull and Ingenious Architect, Innigo Jones," appears in varied words on the title-page of several pageants. "In these things," says Samuel Daniel, who wrote the words for one in 1610, as Ben Jonson had done before, "wherein the only life consists in show, the art and invention of the architect gives the greatest grace, and is of most importance."

It was a common practice to symbolize the company to which the Mayor belonged; also, to pun poorly on his name. Thus, in a city pageant, in 1415 (though not Lord Mayor's Day), when Henry V. returned from Agincourt, because John Wells was Mayor, the whole show was

—"Devised notably indee  
For to accordyns with the Mayers name;"

and three wells which ran wine were exhibited at the conduit in Chepe. So, too, in 1616, when Mr. John Leman was Mayor, "A leman tree in full and ample forme" made part of the pageant.

In the "riding" of 1672, the progenitors of Gog and Magog in Guildhall‡ marched in the van. In earlier times giants always formed part of such processions, not merely in London, but elsewhere,—as in Spain, Antwerp, Chester, Salisbury, Coventry, &c.

The last Lord Mayor's pageant publicly performed, says Mr. Fairholt, was seen by Queen Anne, in 1702. Pageants were devised for the show in 1708, Elkanah Settle being the laureate;§ but these were not exhibited, in consequence of the death of the queen's husband, and after that date the

Mayor's show dwindled to what it now is, and has exhibited few variations since. In 1761 the ancient pageantry was, for the last time, revived by Sir Samuel Fludyer. The present state-coach was brought into use four years previously.

In 1922 Alderman Heygate introduced the three knights; Alderman Lucas, in 1937, had two colossal figures of wicker-work, representing Gog and Magog; and Alderman Pirie, in 1841, introduced an ancient feature, in the shape of a model of a ship, which has been since repeated.

Now, my suggestion does not go to practical puns on the Mayor's name. I do not desire, my Lord, to see, for example, a huge mouse of wicker-work on wheels, seated gravely beneath luxuriant trees, which the old devisers, for want of anything better, would have made to signify

*Mus-grave;*

nor do I suggest representations of mermaids and tritons, or Magnanimity "habited as a Ron an," or fat little incarnations of the Graces and Virtues. But I do think with Thomas Middleton (1613) that some "art and knowledge, equal to the liberality of the City, should be displayed in the invention of their pageants." It would be matter for great regret if so interesting and ancient a proceeding as the Lord Mayor's triumphal "riding" were abandoned. I would not have the multitude lose the enjoyment of a time-honoured sight, intended to shadow forth the wealth, ability, and magnificence of wonderful London, and not without value as an incentive to every beholder, since, as was sung in 1664.—

"For aught we do know, there's ne'er a lad here  
But may be Lord Mayor, or something as near."

And therefore I would raise it out of the monotonous and prosaic routine into which it has fallen, by the introduction, among other changes, of emblems and works of art, accordant with its ancient character, and worthy of the present time. In lieu of the men in mock armour, who have had a long run, or in addition if you please (making their costume real), you might introduce, say three compositions typical of manufactures, agriculture, and the arts; and do honour, if it were but by a series of banners, to the great minds that have taught and raised the world, and to the past worthies who have specially served, adorned, or otherwise improved the City. "Peace has its victories as well as war." Your Lordship, I know, thinks it is time the world gave honour to those who gain such. I do not venture, however, here to set forth what shape the show should actually be made to take: appropriate designs if sought would be obtained without difficulty: my present object will be attained if I succeed in making evident to your Lordship, the desirability of rendering the Mayor's show more worthy of this great city and time than is now the case.

With respectful expressions of a hope that your Lordship's presidency may redound equally to the good of London and your own honour,

I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

GEORGE GODWIN, F.R.S.  
Citizen and Tiler.

Brompton, October 1, 1850.

We are glad to hear that the above has been referred to the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs' Committee for conducting the entertainment, and trust that improvement will, at all events, be commenced in the Show on the approaching 9th of November.

\* For this and much more see Mr. Fairholt's very interesting "History of Lord Mayor's Pageants," printed for the Percy Society, 1843. See also Middleton's works, *Stow, Home, &c.*; also "Chrysantheia, the Golden Fishing," devised by Anthony Munday for the mayoralty of 1616, at the charge of the Fishmongers' Company, and recently edited (with engravings of the pageant) by Mr. John Gough Nichols.

† During the Commonwealth the pageants appear to have been stopped: at all events, they are not recorded.

‡ Anciently called Gogmagog and Corinthus. The history of these figures is very curious.

§ Now, night descending, the ground scene was o'er,  
But lived in Settle's numbers, one day more.  
Page's Dramatist.